"If It's Legal, Is It OK?"

Is It Time to Talk to Your Children About Marijuana?

Recreational use of marijuana is now legal in some states. Various efforts to legalize "pot" are occurring in many other states, including Indiana. Even the Indiana legislature may soon consider a few steps toward more use of marijuana under the guise of "medical marijuana."



AFA of Indiana is skeptical of where these moves may ultimately be headed. However, news stories about marijuana use may create an opportunity to communicate to our children that just because the law permits something, doesn't mean it is healthy or helpful. Moral wisdom does not always go hand in hand with law.

1 Corinthians 6:12 teaches that while many things may be lawful, not all things are beneficial, and that we should not be controlled by such things. Other Biblical passages affirm that regardless of what society allows or practices, or even if something is allowable by scripture, we are to be sober, in control of ourselves and our senses, and be good stewards of our bodies.

A Good Opportunity

This matter of "smoking pot" gives us a good opportunity to speak to children. We can establish clear household rules and outline consequences for drug use just as we would with other behaviors that we deem out of bounds.

However, it is very important that our children know that they can honestly ask us questions and talk with us without fear of punishment in regard to situations they may encounter or wonder about. It is also important that our children get accurate information, rather than from social media or their friends' views.

Marijuana is an illegal drug everywhere in America, for anyone under the age of 21. A teen caught with drugs is committing a crime that can have a damaging impact upon their future in terms of college entrance, military service or getting a job. Drugs have become such a pervasive problem today that most businesses are requiring drug testing and questioning of prospective employees as a condition of employment.

Just Joining the Crowd?

The pull of peer pressure can be very strong with our children. One study found that the top fear of young teens is looking foolish in front of their peers. Yet, not "everyone is doing it."

The Pew Research Center finds that 49% of Americans say they have *ever* tried marijuana only 12% say that they have smoked it within the last 12 months. While drug use is certainly a problem, and marijuana is the most-used illicit drug, only 7 out of 100 Americans 12 years of age or older have used "pot" in the last month. Most youth still say "no" to drugs.

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Not This Crowd of Experts

Parents need to know that there is a strong perception among the general public that smoking

pot is fairly harmless. Children may be influenced by this sentiment. However, among medical experts there is a very different view. A great many medical groups are opposed to the use of marijuana, *including medical marijuana*.

The **American Medical Association's** policy-making body has repeatedly reaffirmed its longstanding opposition to marijuana legalization. The AMA states, "cannabis is a dangerous drug and as such is a public health concern."

Other groups opposing the legalization of marijuana are the **American Academy of Pediatrics**, the **American Academy of Neurology,** the **Glaucoma Research Institute** and the **American** Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology.

The **American Society of Addiction Medicine** states: *"Marijuana is a mood-altering drug capable of producing dependency. While popularly thought to be a fairly benign 'drug,' marijuana can have adverse effects on memory and learning, perception, behavior and functioning, and on pregnancy."*

The **American Psychiatric Association** states: *"There is no current scientific evidence that marijuana is in any way beneficial for the treatment of any psychiatric disorder. In contrast, current evi dence supports, at minimum, a strong association of cannabis use with the onset of psychiatric disorders. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to harm, given the effects of cannabis on neurological development."*

Among the many dangers of marijuana listed by the **Centers for Disease Control**, is this: *"Marijuana use directly affects the brain — specifically the parts of the brain responsible for memory, learning, attention, decision making, coordination, emotions, and reaction time."*

A Trojan Horse?

Our children need to know that everyone has a worldview that impacts their values, beliefs, perceptions, behaviors and actions. Some people who dismiss harms of marijuana or promote medical benefits of marijuana have an agenda.

Richard Cowan, former director of the **National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana**, made this admission about his organization's view and agenda: *"The key to it is medical access, because once you have hundreds of thousands of people using marijuana under medical supervision the whole scam is going to be bought. Once there's medical access … then we will get full legalization."*

Most Vulnerable Among Us

Parents should warn their children that young people are particularly susceptible to the addictive nature of "pot." As Narconon, a leading drug treatment service notes, *"Marijuana use and addiction are most pronounced in America's young people. Of those going to rehabilitation for Weed Addiction, 45 percent are under 21 years of age. When those 24 and younger are included, the percentage rises to 55. Thus it is important to let our youth know the risks, rather than letting them accept the decriminalization campaigns without rebuttal."*

Not Old School Anymore

For whatever reason, there has been a long established fascination with the 1960's hippie culture, particularly among academics and teachers who seem to glorify that rebellious era in American history. This has led many to dismiss their youthful drug use as mere harmless fun. This would be a mistake. Pot has changed a lot since the 60's. The average potency has risen from 3% THC (tetrahydrocannabinol - the intoxicating ingredient impacting the brain) to 9% now, There are some samples of pot that measure as high as 25% today.

Responsible parents will help their children discern mixed messages in the world in order to learn that drug use impairs a person's ability to make good decisions, which can lead to behaviors that carry their own consequences and regrets such as harmful interactions with others, risky behaviors like sexual activity, or criminal actions such as theft or vandalism.